

NCA
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JOSEPH SULLIVAN

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SOUTH KOREA AND THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE

ANNCR:

SOME FORTY THOUSAND AMERICAN TROOPS REMAIN IN SOUTH KOREA NEARLY A QUARTER CENTURY AFTER THE END OF THE KOREAN WAR. JUSTIFICATION FOR THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN SOUTH KOREA HAS BEEN QUESTIONED BY JOURNALISTS, POLITICAL ANALYSTS AND OTHERS. AND THERE ARE PERIODIC REPORTS THAT AMERICAN TROOP REDUCTIONS IN KOREA ARE PLANNED. IN WASHINGTON, THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION THIS WEEK PUBLISHED A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY WHICH ASSESSES THE MILITARY IMPORTANCE OF U.S. TROOPS IN SOUTH KOREA AS WELL AS THE EFFECT OF THEIR PRESENCE ON RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO KOREAN STATES. VOA'S JOSEPH SULLIVAN HAS SOME OF THE DETAILS.

VOICE:

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION REPORT IS BASED ON A STUDY BY RALPH CLOUGH, A PROFESSOR IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN WASHINGTON AND A CONSULTANT TO THE INSTITUTION'S DEFENSE POLICY STAFF. MISTER CLOUGH BELIEVES THE SITUATION ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA ARGUES AGAINST ANY REDUCTION IN AMERICAN MILITARY STRENGTH IN SOUTH KOREA AT THIS TIME. HE AGREES, HOWEVER, THAT CIRCUMSTANCES MAY DEVELOP WHICH WOULD PERMIT THE PHASED REDUCTION OF AMERICAN GROUND TROOPS.

MISTER CLOUGH SAYS THAT AN ASSESSMENT OF MILITARY FORCES IN NORTH AND SOUTH KOREA STRONGLY SUGGESTS THAT NEITHER SIDE HAS AN OVERWHELMING MILITARY SUPERIORITY.

THUS NEITHER SIDE COULD HAVE CONFIDENCE IN ITS ABILITY TO OVERCOME THE OTHER IN AN ALL-OUT STRUGGLE IN WHICH NO OUTSIDE FORCES WERE INVOLVED. HE ALSO AGREES THAT IF ONE ASSUMES THAT CHINESE FORCES ARE UNLIKELY TO INTERVENE IN A RENEWED CONFLICT BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH KOREA, THE PURELY MILITARY JUSTIFICATION FOR THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF AMERICAN GROUND FORCES IN SOUTH KOREA IS WEAK. BUT THE FACT REMAINS, HE WRITES, THAT WITH THE PRESENT NORTH-SOUTH MILITARY BALANCE, A SUDDEN ATTACK UPON THE SOUTH MIGHT LOOK MORE PROMISING TO NORTH KOREA IF IT WERE NO LONGER DETERRED BY THE PRESENCE OF U.S. FORCES.

MISTER CLOUGH SAYS THAT, IN ADDITION TO PROVIDING WHAT HE CALLS A "HEDGE AGAINST MILITARY UNCERTAINTIES," THE PRESENCE OF AMERICAN COMBAT FORCES IN SOUTH KOREA DEMONSTRATES CONTINUED DEEP AMERICAN INTEREST NOT ONLY IN THAT NATION'S SECURITY BUT ALSO IN CONTINUED PEACE IN EAST ASIA. THE KOREAN PEOPLE, HE ADDS, HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN THAT IT WAS THE TOTAL WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES FROM SOUTH KOREA IN 1949 THAT SET THE STAGE FOR THE OUTBREAK OF THE KOREAN WAR IN 1950.

OF ALL THE COUNTRIES IN ASIA, MISTER CLOUGH OBSERVES, KOREA IS THE ONE IN WHICH THE INTERESTS OF THE GREAT POWERS CONVERGE MOST DRAMATICALLY. AS FOR CHINA, HE SAYS THAT PEKING'S RECENT BEHAVIOR RAISES SOME DOUBT ABOUT WHETHER THE CHINESE CONTINUE TO REGARD WITH EQUANIMITY THE PRESENCE OF U.S. FORCES IN SOUTH KOREA. NEVERTHELESS, HE SAYS, THERE ARE STRONG REASONS TO BELIEVE THAT AN EARLY WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES WOULD CREATE UNCERTAINTY AND RISKS THAT CHINA WOULD PREFER

TO AVOID. JAPAN'S PRIMARY CONCERN, HE WRITES, IS SIMILARLY TO PREVENT RENEWED CONFLICT IN KOREA AND IT SEES THE U.S. PRESENCE AS AN IMPORTANT DETERRENT TO ANY AGGRESSIVE MOVE BY NORTH KOREA.

MISTER CLOUGH STRONGLY BELIEVES THAT NO AMERICAN FORCES SHOULD BE WITHDRAWN FROM SOUTH KOREA UNLESS THERE ARE GOOD GROUNDS FOR CONFIDENCE THAT SOUTH KOREAN FORCES -- PLUS A CREDIBLE U.S. DETERMINATION TO INTERVENE MILITARILY -- WILL CONTINUE TO DETER NORTH KOREA FROM ANY RECKLESS ACTION AGAINST THE SOUTH. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF A U.S. WITHDRAWAL ON THE TWO KOREAS, HE CONCLUDES, MIGHT BE AS IMPORTANT AS THE WEAPONRY POSSESSED BY THE TWO SIDES IN DETERMINING BOTH WHETHER NORTH KOREA BEGAN A CONFLICT AND THE COURSE OF THAT CONFLICT.

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